

DUXBURY REPORTER

wickedlocalduxbury.com

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2010

34 Pages ■ 3 Sections ■ Vol. 23, No. 10 ■ 75¢

David Cutler dies at 66

Duxbury Clipper
publisher had
battled cancer

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David Cutler made up his mind more than a decade ago that he didn't want anyone to be sad at his funeral.

Josh Cutler, David's son, recalled that the topic came up when David's father John, his grandfather, died in 1998. The two were walking out of the funeral home when David turned to tell Josh that he wanted the stories told at his funeral to be funny.

"That's what I intend to do," said Josh, who for the last 12 years worked alongside his father at the Duxbury Clipper, the community newspaper started by his grandparents in 1950.

One of those funny stories Josh remembers is the time a cleaning woman threw out the company checkbooks because David carried them around in a green garbage bag.

"From the outside, he was a very successful businessman, but he was very disorganized," Josh said.

Josh, having recently left the newspaper to run for state representative, remembered the legacy of his father on Monday, the day after David Cutler, publisher of the Duxbury Clipper and founder of Mariner Newspapers, including the Marshfield Mariner, died at age 66 after battling cancer the past several months. (See obituary on page 7.)

"We were like best friends. We'd talk about baseball, the Red Sox, politics. He was so knowledgeable about everything," Josh said, recalling that when he was child, he used to come to the old Mariner office, known as "the barn," to play.

David's lifelong friend David Mittell Jr. said it was well known that David's lifelong work was his children.

"But he was so beloved by the people



PHOTO COURTESY JOSH CUTLER

David Cutler, second from left, holds his son Josh in April 1972, when the first Marshfield Mariner office opened on Main Street. Next to David is Josh's mother Suzanne Cutler, and David's then-business partner Michael Stearns is at right.

who worked for him," said Mittell, who wrote columns through the years for the Mariner and then the Patriot Ledger. "He had a great intellect. He was a great reader and loved to talk about history and politics."

Mittell, 66, said he first met David during a tennis match when he was 13.

"It was a challenge match to see who would make the team," he said, adding that David eventually won the battle. "But by the end of the set he and I were friends throughout our lives."

Also memorable was David's sense of humor, Mittell said.

"He would get himself into hysterics off his own jokes," Mittell said.

Former Mariner reporter and executive editor Jane Lane said she will never forget David and the legacy he left behind.

"He really took on the role of mentor for really a generation of reporters," said Lane, who is the press secretary for the Boston-based communications consult-

ing firm Johnston Associates.

Never quite the corporate executive type, she said, David was still a successful businessman and was "hands-on" in just about everything he did.

"He was a newspaperman's newspaperman," Lane said.

Lane, who spent the better part of a decade working under David, said that it was a privilege to work alongside a mentor who fostered such a caring environment. Lane said she continued to stay in touch with David and that she was having a hard time coming to terms with the loss of her friend.

"He was just a life force for hundreds and hundreds of people," she said.

Looking back, David seemed to thoroughly love and enjoy every minute of what he was doing, Lane said, adding, "Life just won't be the same without him in it."

Mary Ford, editor of the Hingham Journal and Cohasset Mariner, recalled

how she fell into the newspaper role in 1989 at David's encouragement.

"I had been working as a freelancer for then-Norwell Mariner editor Judy Enright since February 1988," she said. "David thought I had potential and hired me as a staff reporter. Two-and-a-half years later he promoted me to editor of Hingham and Cohasset."

Ford, a former teacher, said she was truly appreciative of the fact that David gave her a chance in what was a new career at the time.

"David's office door was always open, and he enjoyed hearing about what stories we were working on," she said. "After David left the Mariners, I ran into him from time to time and he always continued to give me encouragement."

What it all boiled down to was that David understood community journalism and what it took to enable a local paper to connect with its readers, Ford said.

"I have continued to incorporate his 'local' philosophy over the years," Ford added.

Mariner pre-press manager Paula O'Brien wrote in an online remembrance book that David also gave her a chance in the newspaper business.

"I remember the day in February 1984 like it was yesterday," wrote O'Brien, recalling that she was a new mother looking to get back into the workforce at the time. O'Brien applied for the nighttime position at the Mariner when it was still located in "the barn," which was its original Main Street office. "I had no idea what 'typesetting' was, but you trusted me and so my journey with the Mariner began."

O'Brien wrote that she had great fun working in the barn and that she was grateful that a number of people from those days are still in her life.

"You were a great boss and always up for a good time. Twenty-six years later I am still in the newspaper business working for the same company," she wrote.

Nancy Small, manager of the creative

SEE CUTLER, PAGE 5

David Cutler dies of cancer

Read photographer
Chris Bernstein's last note
to David Cutler on page 8

FROM CUTLER, PAGE 1

department for the Mariner, said David's passion for newspapers was contagious.

"He relished the role of mentor and obviously enjoyed joining us production types in the 'trenches' (his word)," she said. "This spoke of his respect for every aspect of the process of putting out a newspaper. He had a great sense of humor and a mischievous spark in his eyes when he smiled. The sound of laughter was common in the old house and attached barn that housed the Mariner offices on Main Street in Marshfield."

Small remembered how David asked her once in a meeting about the status of some upcoming project and her reply that "hopefully" it would be done on time.

"He responded, with the familiar smile and gleam in his eye, that 'hopefully' was a weak word," she said. "I can still hear David's voice when I use that word!"

Former Norwell Mariner editor and Patriot Ledger reporter Judy Enright recalled how she met David when they worked together as reporters for the Patriot Ledger in the late 1960s.

"He was the ultimate community journalist," said Enright, who was editor of the Hanover Mariner and Norwell Mariner before leaving for a freelance career in 1997. "One of his big things was that the paper had to be, quote, relentlessly local, end quote, which I think the Mariners always have been."

David, she said, believed in countless reporters and editors along the way and gave them the chance to succeed.

"He was just a great boss, he

was very understanding and he knew what he was talking about when it came to journalism," she said.

David recruited Marilyn Jackson from the Patriot Ledger to be the editor of the Marshfield and Scituate papers. She later edited the Canton Journal, Stoughton Journal and Randolph Mariner, and is now editor of Boston Homes.

Jackson recalled David as "a consummate journalist and storyteller and friend who thoroughly enjoyed life."

"He also was a great teacher and advocated the 'loaf of bread' school of journalism," she said. "He would tell new reporters to go to the store, buy a loaf of bread and come back with a story!"

Jackson said David also regaled those around him with tales typographical errors, after appropriate admonishment.

"He often retold the story of a wedding that was printed in the Clipper — it must have been in the '50s or early '60s — and along with a description of the bride's ivory taffeta gown Venetian lace was a sentence that the bridesmaids wore slime green gowns."

Jackson also remembered a story David frequently told from before she joined the Scituate Mariner in 1985.

"The front page top story was about a mini-crime wave in Scituate, probably housebreaks, and next to it was a huge picture of the police chief wielding an axe at an auction. It's an image that is hard to forget," she said. "David was always passionate about community journalism and

as a result has created an incredible network of friends. We'll all miss him."

Lane's current boss at Johnston Associates, former Democratic state representative and state Democratic chairman Phil Johnston of Marshfield, recalled how David covered much of his tenure as a politician working in the State House. At the time, David was the Patriot Ledger's State House reporter.

"We got to know each other very well," he said. "I got to witness first-hand the tremendous business acumen that he possessed."

David, Johnston said, naturally understood that there was a market for weekly newspapers of high quality.

"Before David ran the Mariner publications, with the exception of Duxbury, there were no weeklies in communities on the South Shore," Johnston said. "There was a market and he understood it and he filled it with high-quality journalism."

Johnston went on to describe David as a sort of non-partisan figure who had great interest in the issues of the day, especially the techniques of political campaigns.

"We shared that interest," Johnston said. "When I look at my years on the Legislature, he was really a dominant force on the South Shore during that period."

Johnston said he and his wife Beverly would miss their old friend.

"When I look back on the 35 years that I knew him, I think

the bottom line about him was that he showed everyone what a positive impact high-quality journalism can have on a community," he said. "He was tough on public officials, but not unfair."

WATD owner Ed Perry made the point that David was known for much more than launching the Mariner newspapers.

"We had a lot of fun with the Southbridge radio station," he said, explaining that he worked with David as a technical consultant at the time. "He just liked to do stuff. He would try anything but he loved the print stuff. He loved the concept of the regional newspapers. I never could quite keep track of them all."

Perry cited the Duxbury Clipper as David's strongest paper and likened it to an "impenetrable" institution in the community. He said that when David took over the newspaper from his parents, who had passed away, he "shook the place up in terms of getting new technology and having new ideas."

"I got to give the Cutler family credit, they passed the torch well in Duxbury. We're going to miss him; he was a hell of a guy," Perry said.

Land-use consultant Robert Flavell recalled the early days when he worked with David as a reporter at the Patriot Ledger. He said that David had returned to the Patriot Ledger in 1970 after a tour of duty in Vietnam, but left two years later to start the Marshfield Mariner.

"It expanded from there," he said.

Flavell went on to law school and ended up working as David's lawyer prior to briefly taking on the role of executive editor for the newspaper.

"He bought several other papers and finally had to buy a press," he said.

David moved his operation to its current Enterprise Drive location before selling it to Capital Cities/ABC for \$8 million in 1989. As a part of that contract, he stayed on for five years to run the company before moving on.

"He was a builder. There was absolutely no stopping David Cutler," Flavell said.

Flavell remembered David's old office at "the barn" and how his friend used to have a sign posted outside the office door that simply stated: "Thinking."

"If he had that sign up, everyone knew not to bother him. He would be thinking alongside a big mound of papers. He would come out and say, 'We're going to buy a newspaper,'" Flavell said.

David built his community newspaper business despite the fact that he didn't have an "MBA or any of that fancy stuff they have now. He did it with a piece of paper and a pen," Flavell said.

Publishing newspapers isn't exactly a profitable endeavor, Flavell added, but David still managed to make it just that.

"David's the only one I ever knew that made money in the community newspaper business," he said. "He was the best newspaperman and the best newspaper businessman I ever met."